Chapter Three

Christian and Pliable Converse Along the Way

A. Christian Enquires Concerning Pliable's Commitment.

Now I saw in my dream that when Obstinate had turned back, Christian and Pliable talked as they went ahead over the plain; and thus they entered into earnest conversation.

CHRISTIAN: Now tell me, neighbor Pliable; how are you getting along? I am glad you were persuaded to come along with me. Had even Obstinate felt what I have sensed concerning the powers and terrors of the world to come that are presently unseen, he would not have so lightly turned his back upon us.

PLIABLE: Then good neighbor Christian, since there are only the two of us here, do tell me further of the things that are ahead, what they are like, how they will be enjoyed, and where we are going.

CHRISTIAN: I can better appreciate them with my mind than with my tongue. Nevertheless, since you are eager to know, I will describe them to you from my book.

PLIABLE: And do you believe that the words of your book are certainly true?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, definitely so, for it was written by he who cannot possibly lie.¹

He seems to have gained a convert to his way of thinking. However, in his simplicity he lacks discernment and caution, perhaps due to his overriding desire for fellowship.

1. He assumes that Pliable's motivation is similar to his own.

Elated at having company on his journey, he does not understand that some may flee from the City of Destruction for the wrong purpose, just as many walked with Christ during his earthly ministry for the wrong reason (John 6:26-36).

2. He condemns Obstinate for lightly spurning weighty testimony.

On the other hand, Christian is impelled by “the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:5). Perhaps Obstinate, like many today, feared to even taste the truth lest he be enticed.

¹ Tit. 1:2.
3. He commends Pliable to the truth of his reliable book.

First he gives assurance concerning the integrity of the Bible’s author (Tit. 1:2). But then, what parts of the Word of God does he recommend to his new-found friend? Are they suitable to Pliable’s condition? Is Christian wise in his selection?

B. Christian Encourages Pliable Regarding Future Delights.

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PLIABLE: Well said; tell me, what things are they?

CHRISTIAN: There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given to us so that we may inhabit that kingdom forever.²

PLIABLE: Again, well said; but tell me still more.

CHRISTIAN: There are crowns of glory to be given to us, and garments³ that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of Heaven.⁴

PLIABLE: This is excellent. What further details are there?

CHRISTIAN: There will be no more crying or sorrow; For he who is the owner of that place will wipe all tears from our eyes.⁵

PLIABLE: And what company shall we have there?

CHRISTIAN: There we shall be with the seraphim and cherubim,⁶ creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There also you shall meet with the thousands and ten thousands that have traveled ahead of us to that place; none of them are unkind, but rather loving and holy, everyone walking in the sight of God and standing in his presence with everlasting acceptance. In a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns;⁷ there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps.⁸ There we shall see men who were, by this present world, cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten by beasts, drowned in the sea,⁹ because of the love that they maintained for the Lord of the place, all well, and clothed with the garment of immortality.¹⁰

PLIABLE: The hearing of this is enough to ravish a person’s heart. But how shall we be able to enjoy and share in these things?

CHRISTIAN: The Lord, the governor of that country, has recorded in this book¹¹ that, in essence, if we are truly willing to have them, he will bestow them upon us freely.¹²

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² Isa. 45:17; John 10:27-29.
³ Matt. 13; II Tim. 4:8; Rev. 3:4.
⁴ Gen. 1:16.
⁵ Isa. 25:8; Rev. 7:16-17; 21:4.
⁶ Isa. 6:2; I Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 5:11.
⁷ Rev. 4:4.
⁸ Rev. 14:1-5.
⁹ John 12:25.
¹⁰ II Cor. 5:2-5.
He excitedly conveys something of the glory of the Celestial City, and Pliable, like many of this world who seek personal comfort and advancement, is keen to learn more. Few men and women really prefer hell to heaven. So he offers:

1. An endless kingdom and everlasting life.
   

2. Crowns of glory and radiant garments.
   
   Consider Genesis 1:16; II Timothy 4:8; Revelation 3:4-5, 18.

3. No more crying, sorrow, or tears.
   
   Consider Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:3-4.

4. The company of innumerable angels, saints, and martyrs.
   
   There will be cherubim, seraphim, thousands of faithful martyrs, crowned elders, and supremely the vision of God (Is. 6:2; John 12:25; II Cor. 5:2-5; I Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 4:4; 5:11-12; 7:16-17; 14:1-5).

5. The knowledge that these blessings come freely.
   
   These gracious benefits offered in Christian’s book are for all who are willing to receive them, and then persevere and endure to the end (Is. 55:1-7; John 6:37; 7:37; Rom. 3:24; 5:17; 8:32; Rev. 21:6; 22:17).

6. Application.

   However, Christian is dim in his observation. Pliable does not have a burden on his back, or better, an awareness of his sin and guilt. As, no doubt, Christian had become burdened when he learned of the demands of God’s righteousness, so he ought to have first declared this basic truth to his somewhat giddy friend. Thus, in error, he declares the gospel or good news of free grace without first announcing the bad news of Pliable’s just condemnation. It is not surprising that this pilgrim does not persevere.
C. Pliable is Initially Enthusied and Suggests a Faster Pace.

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**PLIABLE:** Well, my good companion, I am glad to hear of these things; so come on, let us mend our pace [travel more rapidly].

**CHRISTIAN:** But I cannot go as fast as I would like on account of this burden that is on my back.¹³

He is ravished by the prospect of such innumerable delights, so that his excitement might seem to be most commendable. But enthusiasm, while highly desirable when grounded upon truth, can also be delusive when it lacks a solid foundation.

1. His eagerness is yet wrongly motivated.

   “Come on, let us mend [improve] our pace,” is an invitation to hurry along and not dawdle. At face value, this may seem a laudable attitude, but such shallow eagerness can yet be deceptive on account of it being enthusiasm that lacks a right foundation. But further, is Christian really dawdling, or laboring under stress?

2. His light step contrasts with Christian’s burdened struggle.

   By implication, Pliable has no felt load, no sense of sin and guilt, no troubled conscience, no proper appreciation of difficulties to be encountered. Whereas Christian wearily drags his feet, and finds in his book not only great hope, but also the prospect of sobering trials (Acts 14:22).

3. Application.

   Like many today who dabble in Christianity, Pliable sees his journey as being paved like a sprint track on which he may run ever so lightly, rather than as a threatening jungle pathway along which he must march with a full pack! Moreover, he is motivated by a longing for personal benefits rather than the primacy of thirsting after righteousness (Matt. 6:33). He wants to feel good in himself rather than be right before God.

   a. Many people want the riches of heaven on their own terms even though they are not appropriately dressed applicants by which they might gain entrance (Matt. 22:1-15).

   b. Many people want to win the prize at the end of the race without going into training with the attending agonies and rigors of self-sacrifice (I Cor. 9:24-27). Such contestants are usually not victorious.

   c. Many people desire a crown without accepting that it comes only by way of a cross (Matt. 16:24; Phil. 3:10-11). They want a comfortable ride to the Celestial City even as Nathaniel Hawthorne well portrays in his *The Celestial Railroad.*

¹³ Conviction of sin distinguishes Christian from Pliable.
d. Many people are like the seed that fell on shallow, rocky ground. Initially they rejoice and enthuse, but later on they fall away in the face of affliction and persecution. Why is this so? Because, as Christ taught, such a person “has no root in himself” (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21). Whyte expounds on this point as follows: “And any religion that most men have is of this outside, shallow, rootless description. This was all the religion that poor Pliable ever had. This poor creature had a certain slight root of something that looked like religion for a short season, but even that slight root was all outside of himself.” ¹⁴ But what a contrast Christian provides, for his burden also represents an outwardly visible conflict that is born, not of external stimuli, but rather deep stirrings of his soul concerning inward corruption.

¹⁴ Alexander Whyte, Bible Characters, I, p. 33.